

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 30, 2005

The Honorable Marion C. Blakey  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

We have learned, with great concern, that Hector International Airport's air traffic control tower in Fargo, North Dakota, is on the list of towers the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is considering for reduction of hours. The FAA has considered such action previously, in both 1993 and 1998. However, given the importance of 24-hour coverage for the local National Guard unit, the role that it plays for service at the local hospital, and the flexibility it provides for commercial flights in the entire region, the FAA has determined that the tower should remain open full time. As the FAA undertakes its current analysis, we urge you to reaffirm the 1993 and 1998 commitments and maintain 24-hour service of Hector Airport tower.

Maintaining 24-hour tower coverage at Hector Airport is crucial for air passengers traveling to and through North Dakota, as well as critical operations with the state. First, Hector Airport provides tower services to the North Dakota Air National Guard (NDANG) in support of their night operations which routinely take place after midnight as well as their 24-hour firefighter presence in the event there is an aircraft emergency. In our post September 11<sup>th</sup> world, it is imperative that 24-hour tower coverage be maintained should the NDANG be put on alert and be required to use the airport.

Reducing Hector Airport's tower operations would also greatly inconvenience airline passengers flying into and out of Fargo if flights had to be cancelled or redirected because of delays requiring post-midnight landings. Furthermore, community leaders have been working aggressively to increase the level of air service into Hector Airport. Reducing the tower's service hours would not only make it more difficult to maintain the Airport's current level of service, but would also hamper the community's efforts to attract new service.

Hector Airport is also a primary bad weather diversion site for passenger planes rerouted from airports, such as Minneapolis, because it possesses the facilities, equipment and infrastructure necessary to allow the safe operation of any aircraft. Planes would not be able to use Hector Airport during all weather conditions if the tower was not staffed to monitor the instrument landing system. It is important to note that Hector Airport's tower is the only 24-hour control tower between Minneapolis and Billings, Montana.

Fargo's air traffic control tower also plays a vital role in MeritCare LifeFlight's ability to provide essential community services. LifeFlight responds to communities throughout North Dakota, northwestern South Dakota and northwestern Minnesota for medical transports. It is during the proposed hours for closure that an air traffic control tower proves to be most essential in delivering these services.

Over the past five years, LifeFlight provided approximately 1,000 patients with the urgent life-saving care needed throughout these hours. By closing air traffic control during the proposed hours, LifeFlight staff may be required to provide healthcare services in an unsafe or untimely manner due to the lack of radar coverage within the region.

Altering the 24 hour status of the Fargo Tower would also negatively impact the University of North Dakota's (UND) School Of Aerospace Sciences' flight operations. In accordance with FAA requirements under Part 141, UND Aerospace students enrolled in the Commercial/Instrument Pilot Airplane course must complete 20 takeoffs and landings at an airport with an operating tower, including nighttime flights. During the summer hours, total darkness does not occur until 10:30 PM, which would prevent these instructional flights from landing until after midnight. Should the Fargo Tower close, these UND students will have no choice but to travel to the next closest 24-hour tower in Duluth, South Dakota, which is a 426 nautical mile round trip. This extra travel time and distance creates an unnecessary economic burden for these UND students who are charged for the flights.

The Municipal Airport Authority is also concerned about personnel and equipment operating on the airfield during the hours the tower could be closed. Without the tower staff monitoring traffic and advising each accordingly, this would create an unsafe operation for the pilot and airport staff.

We have significant concerns about the possibility of the FAA including Hector International Airport's air traffic control tower on its proposed list of closures, and urge you in the strongest possible terms to maintain local air traffic services at Hector 24-hours a day. To further emphasize the aviation community's support for 24-hour service, we have enclosed for your review the numerous letters we have received on this important matter.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

  
EARL POMEROY

  
KENT CONRAD

  
BYRON L. DORGAN

EP:mr

Attachment: